

CONSERVATION Showcase

NRCSers On Mission To Spread Word

The Los Lunas Plant Materials Center is on a mission to spread the word about riparian planting techniques that work, and seeking the help of the New Mexico soil and water conservation districts to do so. Their recent demonstration field day hosted by the Pritzlaff Ranch, near Las Vegas, New Mexico illustrates their efforts to spread the technology they have developed over the past two decades.

The Pritzlaff Ranch demonstrated a lesson learned from thousands of transplants they installed in 2001 with each plant housed in a three-foot plastic shelter tube. While the tubes were to provide protection from the wind, reduce transpiration demands by shading, and provide supplemental water from condensation; they were no match to the drought prone Southwest, and less than five percent of the plants survived. This unfortunate experience illustrated how water is generally the limiting factor affecting plant establishment in New Mexico.

At the core of the technologies the Plant Materials Center has developed is connection of a plant's roots or main stem with ground water released from bank seepage by a river. The Pritzlaff Ranch field day offered hands on training on drilling monitoring wells with portable well drilling equipment, planting willows with electric rotary hammer drills, placing longstem transplants at the proper depth in augured holes, and planting cottonwood pole cuttings on the Sapello River. By using these techniques and



Planting willows to 30" depth using electric rotary hammer drills

connecting the plants' roots or main stem with the groundwater, only limited or no follow up irrigation will be needed to establish these plants. A special note needs to be made that hand tools are ineffective.

The Pritzlaff Ranch field day was attended by local producers and staff from the Las Vegas and Mora USDA Service Centers, Army Corps of Engineer Albuquerque District office, and Biophilia Foundation. Brochures on all the planting techniques demonstrated were provided so note taking was not required.

The Plant Materials Center is well recognized for its expertise in riparian restoration techniques, and is now soliciting interest in future workshops in your area. Greg Fenchel, Plant Materials Center manager, can be contacted at 865-4684.